



Planned Evaluation on YoungStar

One of Department of Children and Family's (DCF) goals is to improve the quality of care for Wisconsin's youngest children by supporting parents in making informed child care decisions and child care providers in their efforts to provide high quality care. In order to inform continuous system improvement, DCF is committed to studying the effectiveness of the current YoungStar program. An effective child care quality rating and improvement system involves several key ingredients: participation by child care providers, implementation of effective technical assistance by YoungStar program staff, Parents' awareness and use of quality ratings, and a meaningful rating system.

DCF program staff and partners have been actively monitoring the program's implementation, paying careful attention to child care provider participation and the provision of technical assistance. DCF is also working in collaboration with the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families to complete program evaluation on the implementation of YoungStar as viewed by child care programs through interviews and focus group participation. Sample survey questions will include provider/program identification of needed supports necessary to help programs reach increased quality. When YoungStar was approved by the Legislature in 2010, a child outcomes study, was required and referenced in the original five year plan for the YoungStar program.

Examining the success of the quality rating scale itself requires significant study. In designing the rating scale, developers hoped to craft something that would accurately assess the quality of the environments that children experience and give a higher rating to those environments that better promote healthy development and school readiness. The best way to assess its effectiveness in this regard is to collect data on children's learning and outcomes and compare how children's development compares across providers of differing quality ratings.

To do this, DCF has contracted with Dr. Katherine Magnuson (UW-Madison), an expert in early childhood policy and programs, to conduct an independent quality rating system validation study. The validation study is designed to examine whether providers with higher ratings are better able to promote healthy development and learning. The validation study will begin in the summer of 2013, by randomly selecting approximately 160 child care providers serving children in two communities (Milwaukee county and

one other region). From these providers, approximately 800 three- to five-year-olds will be randomly selected to participate in the study. Their development and learning will be assessed by trained project staff twice—in the fall of 2013 and the spring of 2014. At the same time, parents, teachers and staff will be surveyed about individual children's behavior and wellbeing, as well as their experiences with the YoungStar program. To understand whether the rating scale works as intended to identify high quality programs, the study will test whether gains in children's health, behavior, and skills from fall to spring are larger in higher rated settings compared with lower rated settings.

The direct assessments of children will include a range of important early developmental assessments including, for example, measures of receptive vocabulary (Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test) early language and literacy (Woodcock Johnson Letter-Word subscale, Preschool Language Scale, early mathematics (Woodcock Johnson Applied Problems subscale) as well as a measure of children's executive functioning (pencil-tap or a card sorting tasks). Parents and Teachers will provide reports of individual children's approaches to learning, health behaviors, and socio-emotional development.